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JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM
IDENTIFICATION FORM

AGENCY : NARA
RECORD NUMBER : 176-10036-10081
RECORD SERIES : National Security Files
AGENCY FILE NUMBER :

ORIGINATOR : WH
FROM : Rostow
TO : Bundy, McGeorge
TITLE :
DATE : 11/15/1961
PAGES : 2
SUBJECTS :
DOCUMENT TYPE :
CLASSIFICATION :
RESTRICTIONS :
CURRENT STATUS :
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 9/10/2000
OPENING CRITERIA :
COMMENTS : National Security Files, Box 195: Vietnam, 11/14/61-11/15/61. Box 2

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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November 15, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. BUNDY

FROM:

WWR

SUBJECT: Comment on TDCS-3/492,958.

Whatever instructions President Diem issued it is evident that the military and civil officials concerned with the war spared us no details in emphasizing (or over-emphasizing) the seriousness of the situation.

With specific reference to the highland area of Central Viet-Nam, not only was the Taylor Mission informed of the situation, but Mr. Joseph Alsop as well. The problem there is that the officer commanding has at his disposal perhaps 7,000 troops to protect the Kontum-Pleiku area; and these troops are stretched thin in support of the civil guard on passive protective missions. He lacks a substantial reserve force in case the infiltrators of recent months into that area should form up and attempt to seize and hold one or both of the provincial capitals in the plateau.

It was partly to provide directly and indirectly against that contingency, among others, that the Taylor Mission urged that some U.S. forces be on hand in Viet-Nam.

As we pointed out in our report, there is no reliable estimate of the scale of forces now in the forests above the plateau which might be assembled for a strike. When briefed by General Don, the Corps Commander in the area, we were given an estimate as high as 16,000 for the scale of VC forces on both sides of the Laos border opposite the plateau. The commander on the spot gave Dez Fitzgerald (and Alsop) a more conservative estimate of 4-5,000. If that force could be assembled, however, it might make grave difficulties if it should strike, given the lack of a local reserve and the time required to move up a reserve force from elsewhere.

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Beyond this specific area, it was the judgment of our mission that the "regime had lost control of the security situation" only in the sense that its existing forces were stretched so thin that it lacked the mobile reserve (as well as the intelligence, command structure and mobility) to go on to the offensive. The mission concurred in the view that it would be wise to introduce some friendly foreign forces in order to raise the "morale of the VNA and encourage the population at large."

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